



## **Fires change focus**

***Fort Bragg Fire Department's safety classes to target adults following blazes in post homes***

***by Lucille Anne Newman***

***Paraglide 12 February 2004***

All throughout the year, the Fort Bragg Fire Department's Fire and Emergency Services Public Fire Education teams visit community events and schools to teach children about safety.

All throughout the year, the Fort Bragg Fire Department's Fire and Emergency Services Public Fire Education teams visit community events and schools to teach children about safety.

But across Fort Bragg, there are many quarters damaged by fire. According to Captain Pete Duffy, Public Fire Education instructor, the number of home fires has not decreased, but it's not children who are at fault - it's their parents.

"We need to talk to the adults and get them educated," Duffy said. He said for two years he has noticed that a majority of the fires were due to unattended cooking.

Ramsey Hawley, Picerne Military Housing, director of capital improvements, maintenance and purchasing, said since Picerne took over the communities last August, he has seen four fires in the housing area, and of the four, one was caused by a grease fire in the kitchen.

Depending on how much damage was done to military quarters after a fire, a family may be temporarily moved to another home on post or may have to find a home off post until the repairs are made, according to Victor Cohut, Picerne director of military affairs.

"During (the grease-fire incident) it was determined that the family could reoccupy the house, and we would proceed to do the repairs," Cohut said.

He said in more severe incidents it has been determined by the Fort Bragg Fire Department that it was unsafe for the family to return.

Damage to an individual housing unit can cost from \$12,000 to \$25,000 or more to restore a home. If a fire is caused by gross negligence a family can be found and held liable for the damages.

“What will happen then is that the family will be moved into a temporary housing unit,” said Tim O’Connor, Picerne program director for Fort Bragg. Based on the fire departments findings, O’Connor said the family could be placed in another home on post or may be asked to move off post permanently.

The decision to move a family into another home on post or ask them to find residence off post is not up to the Picerne Military Housing office, instead the decision is made by Management Council members which include representatives from Picerne Military Housing, the deputy garrison commander, the garrison sergeant major, director of Public Works Business Center, Staff Judge Advocate representative and a Residential Community Initiative program representative.

“If a resident does have to move because the home is (too dangerous to occupy) they will most likely move into a home in the same neighborhood,” said Kelly Douglas, Picerne communications manager.

“We don’t want people to think that if there is a fire they will be moved to another or better neighborhood.”

Although most of the homes in the community are equipped with safety devices and in some of the newer homes a fire suppression unit in the kitchen, knowing the devices are there are sometimes not enough, Douglas said.

“We publish safety articles in a monthly newsletter that covers information from testing the batteries in a smoke detector to fire prevention tips for the home.”

O’Connor added that another initiative Picerne has planned is to “have a continuing education program on safety in the home,” with fire safety being a critical component.

“Dangers such as candles in the home, being careful with preparing food on the stove, the dangers of overloading electrical (outlets) and ongoing safety training for the residents,” he said.

The Fire Prevention team will broaden its scope to include adults. “When you talk to adults they tend to have a fixed frame of mind,” Duffy said. “They think that (a fire) will never happen to them. So now we need to teach the adults.”

To reach adults the fire prevention teams will try to attend even more neighborhood functions to talk about fire safety, Duffy said. The strategy to educate the adult population is to work with the community mayors.

“We will be glad to work with them when they call in a request. Firefighters have a wealth of education information and real life experience they are happy to share,” Duffy said. “We’re not the bad guys; some adults look at us as if we’re interfering with their

home life. All we're trying to do is create a safe environment in the neighborhood that they live in."

For more information about fire safety, to schedule a fire safety event or ask for a quick safety inspection, call the Fort Bragg Public Fire Education team at 432-6727.

For more information about fire safety in the housing communities, visit the Picerne Military Housing community manager's office located in your community.